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ABSTRACT

This study investigated how men involved in higher education settings change and develop positive attitudes toward women and feminism using naturalistic inquiry, phenomenological, and ethnographic research methods. An unstructured, open-ended, interview protocol was used to talk with men about their attitudes toward women and feminism. The five men who were interviewed were chosen because of their essentially pro-feminist viewpoint and commitment to work for social justice. Content analysis of the interviews are presented in two contexts. First, ideas and statements from each man are presented as a story of his changing attitudes. Then, themes or topics that appeared across different interviews are discussed as possible patterns, metaphors, and processes of web-like development. Patterns that appeared in the interviews covered the importance of recognizing contradictions, epiphanies and conversion experiences, children, and working against sexism. The patterns indicate that the subjects' development was not a linear, hierarchical movement but more web-like. Also noted was the impact of the higher education environment for development and changing attitudes, and the role of the researcher in the type of study presented here. (JB)

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# THE DEVELOPMENT OF MEN'S ATTITUDES TOWARD WOMEN AND FEMINISM

by

John Milam

Paper presented at the 17th Annual Meeting of the
Association for the Study of Higher Education
in Minneapolis, Minnesota
October 30, 1992

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# THE DEVELOPMENT OF MEN'S ATTITUDES TOWARD WOMEN AND FEMINISM

John Milam

## Introduction

Higher education has a unique role to play in challenging negative stereotypes and fostering positive attitudes about women. Important recent work has analyzed higher education according to feminist perspectives (Acker, 1991; Burton-James, 1991; Glazer, 1990; Gumport, 1991; Middleton, 1991; Reinharz, 1991; and Townsend, 1991). Issues of sexism, sexual harassment, date rape, sexual abuse, women's development, and domestic violence have been topics of numerous empirical research studies, academic essays, and popular debates. What is missing from the higher education, feminist, and student development literature, however, is research on how institutions may work at the developmental level to foster men's appropriate attitudes about women.

This paper presents the preliminary results of research which investigates how men involved in higher education settings change and develop positive attitudes toward women and feminism. It is expected that themes of changes in men's lives will suggest possible strategies, critical incidents, educational experiences, and perspectives that may be facilitated in a higher education environment.

At the outset of the study, I chose to give importance to the assumptions of the radical humanist paradigm, as defined by Burrell and Morgan (1979). The methodology employed in the study is often associated with subjective social science (i.e. naturalistic inquiry, phenomenology, and ethnography), in that it is subjective, idiographic, voluntarist, and anti-positivist. The radical sociological perspective of the research is similar to that of critical theory, feminist inquiry, and afrocentrism, in that it is concerned with radical change, conflict, contradiction, domination, deprivation, emancipation, and potentiality.

Since the subjective social science assumptions of radical humanism provide the background for learning about how men develop positive attitudes, certain metaphors guide the inquiry. For example, ideas concerning hierarchical, linear, or cumulative development and education are exchanged for heterarchic, holistic, inter-connected, contextual, and web-like images. Also fundamental to the inquiry are the radical sociological assumptions that patriarchy and sexism are part of the fabric of existence in higher education settings and that men inherently legitimize the oppression of women unless they are living and working from a a pro-feminist perspective. The documentation of assumptions is addressed in the literature (Milam, 1991, 1992) and is not the topic of this research.

## Methodology

An unstructured, open-ended, interview protocol was used to talk with men about their attitudes toward women and feminism. Based in part on the protocols of Perry (1970) and Belenkey et al. (1985), the interview began with the question "What stands out for you about your attitudes toward women and feminism?"

Using the naturalistic and constructivist methods discussed in Patton (1980) and Lincoln and Guba (1985), I let the men tell me whatever they wanted to about such topics as their theoretical positions on feminism, their relationships with women, and their personal growth. When nothing else "stood out for them," I asked "What stands out for you about your attitudes toward women and feminism five and or ten years ago?" This question was repeated, when necessary, to focus on longer periods of time.

When nothing else stood out for them, I asked "How do you view your development in your attitudes toward women and feminism?" While the choice of the word "development" may be perceived as leading to a linear and hierarchical perspective on change, the word was used as a metaphor and only after the bulk of the interview had focused on what the men chose to talk about contrasting their more recent attitudes versus those of five and/or ten years ago.

The five men who were interviewed were chosen because of what I believe to be their essentially pro-feminist viewpoint and commitment to work for social justice. I have known each of the men for at least a year, and have had numerous individual and group discussions with them about feminist issues. All of the men have been part of different men's groups which were devoted to the goals of consciousness-raising, enhancing men's lives, being pro-feminist, and being gay-affirmative. No litmus test was used to determine whether the men are truly pro-feminist, as they described themselves. The research question of interest is not whether the men are really pro-feminist, but whether there are important events, relationships, or ideas which accompany positive changes in their attitudes.

In discussing the methodology for the interview ahead of time, the men agreed to be co-participants in the research. They have chosen different levels of involvement in reviewing, editing, and discussing the "data" of their own lives. They were all aware of my interest in trying to use the radical humanist paradigm and the metaphor of a web to describe growth in attitudes about feminism.

Prior to beginning this research, I wrote several papers about possible models for a theory of men's development in attitudes toward women. I discussed my ideas and methodological approach with scholars in the field, among them Mary Belenkey, Arthur Chickering, Clifton Conrad, Sam Kellams, Gary Rhoades, and William Tierney. A methodological log was kept during the course of the interviews. Changes were made in the interview procedure based on insights and problems which I encountered. Peer-debriefing was done throughout the research process. Memo-writing was also a useful tool.

In recognition of my own assumptions about the topic and my attraction to the radical humanist paradigm, I went through a period of significant autobiographical reflection to understand my attitudes and ideas about men, women, and feminism. While the role of interviewer with open-ended, unstructured questions is often to mirror and reflect back what the respondent has said, it is critical to realize that, as a person, I am myself an instrument of research. Who I am, how I communicate my own ideas about feminism, and how I

describe myself as a researcher all greatly influence the dialogue with other men. While I feel that I was successful in creating a feeling of warm, personal regard for each man I interviewed, the success of the project is due in part to the level of trust built up in each relationship over time.

Since much of the research question is grounded in the choice of the radical humanist paradigm, I became engaged in continued reading, thought, and dialogue about the under ing assumptions of subjective consciousness and oppression, about feminism, and about women's, adult, and student development theory. This combination of activities was chosen to ensure the trustworthiness of the data gathering.

Each interview was taped and transcribed. I had originally hoped to transcribe the interviews myself. However, a new job and move precipitated my choice to hire a transcriptionist. Each of the men agreed to this decision, and an agreement of confidentiality was signed with the person who transcribed the data.

Grounded theory building was done according to the constant comparative method described by Glauser and Strauss (1967) and Conrad (198?). After listening several times to each tape and reviewing notes which I made during the interview, I read and re-read the transcripts. Emergent, polychotomous, coding categories were created for any ideas, topics, or statements which I found to be useful to me in my understanding of the changes which each man has gone through in his attitudes about women and feminism.

The preliminary results of this content analysis are presented here in two parts. First, ideas and statements from each man are presented as a story of his changing attitudes. If themes or topics appear across different interviews, these are discussed in the second part as possible patterns, metaphors, or processes of web-like development. The impact of higher education on these themes is also discussed.

A second section of each interview was devoted to another level of research about attitudes. While these additional data may serve to triangulate the results of the open-ended protocol, each part of the interview was designed to stand alone. In the second half of the interview, I read a list of topics ranging from abortion to child-care to work roles. After reading each topic, I asked the question "What stands out for you about your attitudes toward women and the topic in the context of your actual relationships?" Men were encouraged to talk as much as they wanted about any topic, but were reminded that their responses needed to deal with how their attitudes were related to their actual relationships. This protocol was designed to map the impact of personal experiences of feminist thinking through the web of each man's relationships.

The Men's Stories

These stories are told in paraphrases from each man's language. Occasional quotations are used to document language that is either important to the story or unclear in meaning.

**Bill**

Bill works as a staff member at a university and also holds an adjunct assistant professor position. He is married for the second time and has two daughters from this marriage. At forty-two, he attributes much of his learning about feminism to the "context of social upheaval in the 1960's." Two marriages have also given him time to think it over. His first wife was not a feminist at the time, but his second wife is a "strong feminist" and has taught him "a lot about her equal status as a woman." She has put him "in his place," and doesn't let him "get away with anything" or "pull any male pranks." Bill relates that part of the reason for his first divorce was sexism on his part. The divorce led to a period of intense development in thinking about where he'd gone wrong.

Other women have helped teach him about sexism, as have a number of men. Over a period of time, he did a lot of adjusting and rethinking. He listened to a lot of very enlightened people and their attitudes rubbed off. He has paid attention to the media, to news, the issues, and feminist speakers. Part of his feminist beliefs comes from a belief in equality in general, such as in issues of race.

He has been involved in child-care, nurturing his children, feeding them, and changing diapers. Mutually, Bill and his wife want to bring their kids up in a non-sexist atmosphere. He is working through gender roles with his kids and with child-care.

Some changes in Bill's attitudes have come about because he has a female boss at work, "which is a little bit of a change" and "takes getting used to." There are a lot of perceptions about being a male at work and being in a dominant position. People look at him as the authority because he is male as much as because he has the answers. "It's really crazy."

One thing that bothers Bill is reverse sexism, when men are forced to assume traditional sex roles. He doesn't ask his wife to do traditional roles, but she still asks some of him, like taking care of the car. This really is a thorn in his side. He washes and irons his own clothes, and isn't "going to put any sexist roles on her."

"As far as the feminist platform goes," Bill still has "a problem with abortion." He thinks abortion is wrong, but believes in women's right to choose. He asks "How can you believe in two things which are contradictory and how can you reconcile them?"

Bill feels that his development is "incomplete, of course." He doesn't "always know where that next unexpected thing is going to occur" which is going to make him "rethink attitudes." He is open to changes and doesn't think he'll ever retreat.

**Tom**

Tom is a married assistant professor with two children. As a young men, Tom did not start out very sophisticated in his attitudes toward women. There have been what he calls "epiphanies" in his life. One such moment took place when he was in the second grade. He remembers looking across a classroom at a friend and truly wondering "what it is to be really another person in another situation."

He has realized that the practical problems which women face have to do with their being human beings. So, in this sense, he is not a feminist, because the real problem is that women's humanity is being denied. Tom relates his interest in feminism to his desire to gain access to the perspective of the other, then seeing how certain people are not treated with dignity. He has gone through the process of certain battles involving women's rights and human rights and how they are all related to questions of people treating each other with dignity and respect, not as inferior, obedient, and passive partners. The issue of marginalization was also important to his earliest thoughts about feminism - the idea of people aspiring to positions of power, and how women are denied this power.

Five years ago, his interest in feminism was a lot more theoretical. He remembers getting into arguments with feminists over the use of the word man. These arguments weren't yet "tainted by nasty realities." Tom wanted to be able to stay at home, to cuddle the children, and to nurse them. He thinks he sees women as a lot more than objects of sexual desire.

Until recently, his feminism was an intellectual endeavor. You don't really know how bad it is, he says, until you are in a situation where you see it happening and you get involved. He went through a conflict in being asked to be one of the good old boys, "watching how some of the men in the hierarchy have been using and abusing for sexual purposes." He has seen people very courageously and at peril come forward and file charges of sexual harassment.

When personal relationships are involved, you wonder whether you should take your distance. However, he thinks that this is a form of collaboration that empowers the abusers. Quietly tolerating sexual harassment is a form of abuse. Tom feels that this is like the citizens in Nazi Germany watching their Jewish neighbors being rounded up.

The university where the incidents of sexual harassment are taking place has policies and a handbook "that say this thing does not happen, or should not happen, or that the university will take quick and decisive actions to prevent it from happening." However, "It's

kind of a cruel illusion." The reality of power of individuals is something different. He says that "it's been a long, anguishing process, seeing it happen."

**George**

George is a single, assistant professor. According to George, a number of unresolved feelings and conflicts toward women are fueling his interest in the women's and men's movements. These are linked to his relationship with his mother and sisters. Also, he has been struggling for his whole life against attitudes of seeing women in other than sexual terms. That's why he keeps reading feminist literature and going to meetings.

There is a juxtaposition of contrary attitudes, feelings, and disparate images in his life. The obvious example of this is the things that make him laugh, humor at women's expense. He has the tendency to exhibit all of the negative characteristics attributed to men. He admits that, when he meets a woman, the first thing he thinks about is the possibility of having sex with her, usually oral sex.

He knows that there is more to a woman than this and that his attitude reduces her to a sex object. He knows all of the feminist ideological rhetoric. When he looks at himself, he says "I don't see the man I want to be." He recognizes this when he is showing negative aspects of himself or shortly thereafter. He believes that these attitudes are "conditioned" by all of the pornography he has seen.

Developmentally, he locates the beginning of his awareness of feminism to college, where he took an elective, non-credit course for first-year students which involved a long, desensitizing experience of watching a series of sexually explicit films of people who were in relationships making love. After ten hours of a marathon session, he was numbed. The experience really opened him up. A lot of his current interest in feminism stems from the freedom which he found in the class to be able to talk about sexuality. When he left college and moved, he felt something was missing. So he bought a Susan Sontag reader and went to a meeting of women against pornography.

When he reads his old journals from high school, George sees language which he would never use now. When he was in high school, friends and he used to watch edited versions of hard core porn films in their garage. In 1984, he went with a friend to a porno film. He remembers the "holiness" of the experience in the theater and the sense of "reverence" which he and other men had for what they were about to see. Parts of it were shocking, with no cutaways from what he'd seen before. The size of the man's penis on the screen really stood out for him. Some parts really disgusted him and made him feel sick. Late for a college class, he felt guilty. But the images remained, and he couldn't leave them behind. He had "instant movies" in his head. This became a "tyranny of images" because he "couldn't turn it off."

Sometime later, he was with his sister and her husband at a video rental store when she joked about renting a pornographic movie and picked one out. They rented the video but she didn't want to watch it after all. He watched it with his brother-in-law, then kept watching it all night. The same kind of images returned and it was horrible for him. The next morning, he decided to go out and do something "life affirming." He says he did not think of the phrase "life affirming" at the time, but that this describes what he wanted to do. It was fall and he "just collected leaves, yellow leaves, green leaves, red leaves..." This experience with pornography "really soured" him.

This is the juxtaposition. He does something obsessively and compulsively, yet it is really offensive to him, "unbidden" and "not wanted." This is a terrible conflict that keeps playing itself out over and over without being resolved.

Soon after this episode, George moved to a new place, fell in love, and had a positive sexual experience. About this time, a friend asked him to go visit a sex shop with him. He thought about the films he'd seen and the positive sexual experience he was having and just couldn't do it. It would "ruin something" that he thought was special and he didn't want any part of it. This is the "only positive, sexual experience" he has had with a woman. While there were problems, just the fact that he was able to experience it makes him realize that there is more to women than sexuality. Images from the pornographic films are still burnished in his mind and this is a source of struggle. He is troubled because he hasn't been in an intimate relationship for a long time. A lot of things "have come and gone." He's graduated from college and graduate school and written a book in his field, and he still doesn't have a relationship. He says that "in therapy" he is "exploring some of the reasons why this might be the case, looking at past experiences to help explain it."

George has no trouble believing Anita Hill. He feels rage against men who take advantage of positions of power to claim something over women sexually. This makes him want to get involved with the movement even more. He likes being identified with anti-sexism. He finds meaning in life by participating in, being involved with, and being identified with the men's movement and all that goes along with it. He wants to be more involved. However, his hypocrisy stands out for him and he worries that, if people really knew what made him laugh, they would disown him.

**Stephen**

Stephen has a bachelor's degree and has been married for eight years. His wife is attending college part-time and working as a part-time staff member. The college environment is a regular part of both their lives.

Stephen feels confident that he treats women as equal with him. He is comfortable with non-traditional roles both at home and at work. Ten years ago, he agreed with feminist attitudes and politics, but didn't really believe them in his heart. He hadn't been tested yet. His past was very traditional and he grew up in a very structured family environment.

Coming to college, he was really by himself for the first time. His attitudes changed with meeting women and men and creating his own identity away from his family.

For a long time, he didn't have the experience of being with a woman and sharing responsibilities in a house such as washing dishes and caring for children. But during college, he lived in a house with other men that was next door to a woman with a child. Being around her for four years really gave him a feel for that - making food, taking care of the kid. For the first time in his life, he realized that things didn't have to be the way they were, that he didn't have to be in "this masculine male group," that he could be his "own group." At the time, he was able to tell himself that: "Femininity isn't bad. I can grow from that. I can go in that direction. I can be a better person." This experience is the biggest thing that stands out for him about his attitudes toward women and feminism.

Going on from there, there was a process of letting go in every direction with other relationships, including men, and not worrying about what his sexual role was or what his gender role was. This has helped him to see the masculine side to women, not just the feminine. He realized that there is this whole thing that people don't think about or understand. Here was what he wanted to try for - to be more equally masculine and feminine. He said to himself "that's something that I want to be, that's how I want to be."

Being in a close relationship for the past eight years has helped him understand the feminine side of himself and appreciate it more. He is definitely changing his attitudes, "realizing that there's more to me."

Being in a men's group has also helped Stephen. He now knows that there are other men who feel the same way he does, and he is more secure. He is more comfortable with himself in public, especially at work. Now he is willing to confront people with sexism, where before he only sat and thought about how he didn't agree with them. It is a good feeling to be able to tell people these things.

He is sometimes confused over the definition of feminism. It seems to change for him, though it may be the same for others. He says "Sometimes I think that I don't change as fast as the [definition of feminism], or don't change in the way I ought to. I don't realize it."

**Bob**

Bob is a married assistant professor who feels that he is egalitarian. He appreciates the gravity and importance of the problems which women face, and feels that he is supportive of women emotionally, physically, and psychologically. He tries to treat women with respect, to deal with all relationships with equal footing. Bob considers himself a feminist, although it is an issue whether or not a man can be called a feminist.

Bob's says that his attitudes have progressed a great deal. Five years ago, he was married and in graduate school while his wife was in seminary and doing women's issues. This was a period of real consciousness-raising for both of them. Bob describes having a kind of "conversion experience." This was not just in terms of intellectual ascent, but in trying to incorporate his intellectual knowledge into personal and political activities. This coincided with a profound awareness of the complexities of the situation.

As he became conscious of the things he did and said, he also became conscious of the contradictions in his life and tried to work on them. His "mind was racing in terms of a conversion experience. To some extent it seems like the difference between a person saying 'There is a god,' and a person acting on that belief; saying that there is sexism in the world, that's too bad, and then a person acting on it."

His attitudes developed "hand-in-hand" with his wife's. She is more conscious, he thinks, and his development is inextricably linked to hers. She has maintained a step ahead of him. She becomes much more personally conscious and aware of something before he is. She is on the next existential level before he is aware of the gravity of a situation for the situation, of the significance of it for her and for women. Ten years ago, he was aware and conscious of what people said about feminism and about the facts, but he was uninvolved. The problems weren't important to him. Their importance became much more personal when he got married.

His family had its own problems and contradictions as he grew up in a non-traditional family situation. His father was disabled and stayed home while his mother always worked outside the home. His mother kept the bills and handled the money. In his family life, he didn't really have an internal reaction or belief about gender roles. Ideas and ideals were transmitted to him, but they didn't always bear out in the way he imagined or in the way he visualized they would. He had ideals in mind, but the transition from ideals to practice is a very long one and things didn't always work out.

After high school and college graduations, he remembers being disappointed by seeing women who did not live up to their promising futures. He was "personally disappointed" when they got married and had kids.

Bob recognizes that his feminist development is still "incomplete." For "all the nice words," he is "still struggling." One thing he points to is the decision that he and his wife would move after graduation to wherever he could get a job. This was an unconscious expectation.

Bob states that he has some ambivalence to feminism and feminists who are antagonistic, cynical, or alienate other people. Sometimes the dialogue between feminists and pro-feminist men is reduced to non-dialogue. This is a problem that feminism has dealt with or is dealing with even now. "Sexism is so pervasive that you shouldn't alienate the people who are trying to help you. It's a very complex situation."

Metaphors, Processes, and Patterns in the Interviews

The following themes, metaphors, processes, and/or patterns appear in the interviews. Each of these is presented using paraphrases of the men's language, with quotations to document language that is either important to the theme or unclear in meaning.

**Social Context**

Bill refers to the "social upheaval in the 1960's" and a climate of dialogue about feminism as making it possible for him to start examining issues. He has had a lot of contact with different kinds of "enlightened" people whose attitudes rubbed off on him.

Several of the other men mention paying attention to the media, the news, to discussion of feminist issues, and to feminist speakers.

**Theoretical Arguments**

All of the men seem very knowledgeable of the intellectual arguments for feminism. They read widely and ask a lot of questions. They can articulate the standard "feminist platform" and "feminist ideological rhetoric." At different times in their lives, they have been engaged in arguments with men, women, and themselves about all kinds of feminist issues, from gender roles to pornography to the use of the word man.

**Learning from Relationships with Women**

Bill, Bob, and Stephen all speak about the importance of women and especially their spouses to their own feminist development.

Stephen states that his attitudes have changed with meeting women.

Bob says that getting married helped him move from a theoretical to a personal discussion of feminism. He describes his development as being inextricably linked to that of his wife's. She has kept a step ahead of him and becomes much more personally conscious and aware of something before he is. She is on the next existential level and is able before he is to see the gravity of a situation and its significance for her and for women.

Bill learned from his divorce about his own sexism. His second wife, a strong feminist, has put him in his place and doesn't let him get away with sexist behavior. New experiences with women provided him with a period of rethinking and adjusting.

**Learning from Men**

Bill mentions that a number of men helped him learn about sexism.

Stephen speaks about the importance of the men's group. Knowing that other men feel the same way has made him feel more comfortable with himself in public, especially at work where he has begun to confront other men's sexism.

**Seeing Contradictions**

George describes the contradictions in his own behavior. He has been struggling his whole life to see women in other than sexual terms. The juxtaposition of his own contrary attitudes and feelings is very disturbing for him. His hypocrisy really stands out for him. While he finds meaning in participating in, being involved with, and being identified with anti-sexism and the men's movement, he thinks that if people knew what really made him laugh they would disown him.

Bill finds contradictions in his attitudes about abortion. He is against abortion, but for a woman's right to abortion. He asks how someone can believe in two things that are contradictory and still reconcile them?

Bill talks about having a female boss at work as a little bit of a change which takes getting used to. "It's really crazy" how people treat men differently in an office. He is aware of the contradiction of how other people look to him for the answers, just because he is male.

There is a contradiction in reverse sex roles which Bill finds to be a real thorn in his side. He doesn't ask his wife to take on traditional sex roles, but she puts some on him, like taking care of the car. He thinks that "men get a bum rap sometimes" with "sex roles that we're forced to assume." The division of labor doesn't always work out very well.

Tom finds contradictions in his university's handling of sexual harassment. Despite handbooks and policies which state sexual harassment will not be tolerated, the reality is a "cruel illusion." His early theoretical positions and arguments weren't tainted by the "nasty realities." You don't know how bad it is, he explains, until you are in a situation where you see it happening and when you get involved.

Bob mentions seeing the contradiction of the lives of women he went to college or high school with. Despite their being labeled as having promising futures, he was personally disappointed that they didn't live up to their potential, when they decided to get married and have kids.

One other contradiction which Bob points to is the decision that he and his wife would move after graduate school to wherever he could get a job. There was an unconscious expectation that, since he was the husband, he would be the one to find the job.

**Equality**

Bill, Tom, and Bob each make statements about how their interest in feminism is related to their interest in equality. Bill mentions the issue of race. Bob says he tries to deal with all relationships with equal footing.

Tom says that women's rights and human rights involve the same battle. They are all related to the question of people treating each other with dignity and respect, not as inferior, obedient, or passive. He thinks that the practical problems women face have to do with their being human beings. So, in this sense, he says he is not a feminist, because the real problem is that women's humanity is being denied.

**Epiphanies and Conversion Experiences**

Tom recalls being in a classroom in second grade and looking across the room at one of his friends. In what he labels as an "epiphany," the moment made him "truly wonder what it is to be really another person in another situation."

Until recently, feminism was an intellectual endeavor for several of the men. They describe a shift which took place for them in which they moved from an intellectual understanding of feminism to a personal one. Something happened to them, sometimes something sudden and life-changing.

Stephen relates significant learning about himself to the time in college when he lived next door to a woman with a child and watched her making food and taking care of the child. Seeing her made him realize for the first time in his life that he didn't have to be the way he was, that he didn't have to be in this masculine male group, but could be in his own group. Stephen underwent a process of going in every direction with other relationships, including men, and not worrying about what his sexual role or gender role was.

Bob describes something which happened five years ago as a kind of "conversion experience." He was married and attending graduate school while his wife was in seminary. His wife was working on a lot of women's issues and this was a period of real consciousness-raising for both of them. This coincided with his having a profound awareness of the complexities of the situation. He began to work on his own expressions, attitudes, activities, and how he expressed his views. He became aware of the contradictions in his life and tried to work on them. At this time, his mind was "racing like a conversion experience." "To some extent it seems like the difference between a person saying 'There is a god,' and a person acting on that belief; saying that there is sexism in the world, that's too bad, and then a person acting on it."

Bill's first wife was "not a feminist," and he remembers that part of the reason for their divorce was his sexism. After the divorce, he went through a period of intense development in thinking about where he'd gone wrong.

George describes a non-credit, elective course for first-year, college students which involved a long, desensitizing experience of watching a series of sexually explicit films of people who were in relationships making love. After ten hours of a marathon session, he was numbed. He remembers being in the cafeteria and talking about the films. People who weren't part of the experience looked at him, wondering why he was talking so openly about sexuality. The class really opened him up.

In his discussion of the effect of pornography on his attitudes toward women and sexuality, George tells about going with his sister and her husband to a video rental store then renting a pornographic movie. He watched it with his brother-in-law, then kept watching it all night. Later, he couldn't turn the images off and it was horrible. He remembers waking up and, very much in the mood of his college experience, decided to do something "life affirming." It was a beautiful fall morning and he collected different colored leaves. The experience of watching the video really "soured him" about pornography.

Soon after this episode, George moved to a new place, fell in love, and had a positive sexual experience. About this time, a friend asked him to visit a sex shop with him. He thought about the films he's seen and the positive sexual experience he was having and just couldn't do it. They took something "so precious" and "made it so ugly an experience." He "just didn't want any part of that."

**Pornography and Sexuality**

George is the only one of the men to discuss pornography. It is such a powerful theme in his life that it deserves to be mentioned as a separate theme.

George recognizes that his attitudes toward women have been conditioned by all of the pornography he saw up until a couple years ago. He can recall pornographic images seen years ago as vividly as the day he saw them. They are burnished into his mind and are a source of struggle for him.

The first time he went to an unedited pornographic film in a theater, he remembers the "holiness" of the experience, his thoughts about other men in the theater, and his disgust at some of the things which took place in the film. Returning late to a college class, he remembers feeling guilty. This theme is played out several times in the interview. He sees himself acting obsessively and compulsively in a tyranny of pornographic images, then finds these actions offensive and unbidden. This is for him a terrible conflict which keeps playing itself over and over without being resolved.

**Family Environment/Values**

Stephen talks about the effect of growing up in a very traditional and very structured family environment and how this which shaped his early attitudes toward women.

Bob describes growing up in a non-traditional family setting. Bob's father was disabled and stayed at home while his mother always worked outside of the home. His mother kept the bills and handled the money. In this family life, he didn't have an internal reaction or belief about gender roles. Ideas and ideals were transmitted to him. But these did not always bear out in the way he imagined or in the way he visualized they would. These ideals didn't effect him directly or personally until he had been married, and more profoundly after he was married for several years.

**Children**

Bill has been involved in child-care for his two daughters. Along with feeding them, putting them to sleep, and changing diapers, he's "done a lot of nurturing things." He's done these and enjoyed them and thinks that they are real important, but there are other things his wife does, such as arranging for the children's medical care and signing them up for things. Mutually, they want to bring their kids up in a non-sexist atmosphere. Watching television, their children get to see all kinds of sex roles which are inappropriate, but Bill and his wife try to override this.

Tom would like to be able to stay at home with his children. He sees the domestic situation as another issue of marginalization and power relationships. He would "like to be able to cuddle the children and even nurse the children" and things that he "cannot do or does not have the skills to do, or the education, or simply the patience or whatever to do."

Stephen learned a lot from living next door to a woman with a child. Being around her for four years really gave him a feel for making food and taking care of a child.

**Working Against Sexism**

Tom speaks of being in conflict over being asked to become one of the good old boys. He saw men he worked with in the hierarchy of the university using and abusing people for sexual purposes. He saw people very courageously and at peril come forward and file charges of sexual harassment. When personal relationships were involved, he wondered if he should take his distance. He recognized that this is a form of collaboration that empowers the abusers. Quietly tolerating sexual harassment is a form of abuse. It is like Nazi Germany, Tom says, when German citizens saw their Jewish neighbors being taken away. Is it all right because the police commissioner down the street says it is okay? Tom lives with the struggle of confronting sexual harassment.

After being in a men's group, Stephen is more secure and comfortable with himself in public. At work, he has begun to confront people with their sexism, where before he only sat and thought about how he didn't agree with them. He states that it is a good feeling to be able to tell people these things.

George finds meaning in life by participating in, being involved with, and being identified with the men's movement and all that goes with it. He feels rage against men who take advantage of positions of power to claim something over women sexually. This makes him want to get involved with the men's movement even more. He likes being publicly identified with anti-sexism and the men's movement.

**The Changing Nature of Feminism**

Stephen mentions that he is sometimes confused over the definition of feminism. The definition seems to change for him, though it may be the same for other people. Sometimes he doesn't change as fast as the definition.

Bob has some ambivalence to feminists who are antagonistic, cynical, or alienate other people. Sometimes the dialogue between feminists and pro-feminist men is non-dialogue. This is a problem that feminism has dealt with or is dealing with now.

**The Person They Want To Be**

In his movement from a theoretical understanding to a personal one, Bob became conscious of the things he did and said. Aware of the contradictions in his own behavior, he tried to work on his attitudes and activities, and how he expressed his views. Bob realizes that he is not a completely developed person within feminism. He is still struggling against his own context to a situation or prejudice.

Bill recognizes that his development is "incomplete, of course." He feels that he is open to changes. He doesn't know where the next unexpected thing will come from which will make him rethink attitudes he already has.

George is interested in reclaiming the lost feminine part of himself. There is no reason to believe that men and women can't both have all qualities. When he looks at himself, he says he doesn't see the man he wants to be. He talks about the conflict and unresolved feelings he has, about the juxtaposition of contrary attitudes and feelings, and about the disparate images of sexuality and pornography which are still in his mind. George knows all of the "feminist ideological rhetoric," but the tensions and terrible conflict keep getting played out.

Talking about the changing definition of feminism, Stephen says that he doesn't change as fast as the definition. He thinks that he doesn't change in the way he ought to, and doesn't realize it. Seeing how the woman and the child next door to him lived, he said "that's something that I want to be, that's how I want to be."

Processes of Development and Change

The web may serve as a useful image for describing the changes and development which Bill, George, Stephen, Tom, and Bob have gone through in their attitudes toward women and feminism. It is clear from comparing the men's stories that linear, hierarchical maps of development have little utility. Each man has different themes of change in his life. Each theme is restated here as a possible pattern or process of development. These ideas are not offered as conclusions or recommendations, but as possible grounded theories aimed at understanding how men develop positive attitudes toward women and feminism.

The context in which feminism is discussed as part of a larger, social and political agenda may be important to sparking men's early thoughts.

Theoretical arguments and knowledge of feminism may precede a personal relationship to the issues.

Men may learn a great deal about feminism from their relationships with women. Sometimes women may confront men with their sexist behavior. Sometimes men's development may be inextricably linked with that of significant women in their lives. Consciousness-raising may take place together, with women existentially one step above men.

Men may learn from listening to other men who are more enlightened and whose attitudes rub off on them. Men's groups may play an important part in men's development, in that they may make them more confident of their feminine selves and help them develop the strength to confront sexism around them.

Learning may occur when men come up against and witness the real-life contradictions which exist in how women are treated.

Sensitivity to feminist issues may be linked to sensitivity to other issues of equality, such as race.

Some men may experience epiphanies or conversion experiences in which they make important realizations about feminism and subsequently turn theoretical and intellectual ascent into personal action. These critical incidents in men's lives may take place in many different kinds of settings and for many different reasons, from taking a college class to going through a divorce.

The environment and values of the family structures in which men grow up may have an important influence on their later ideas and ideals about gender roles.

Men's relationships to children and issues of child-care may be important to their changing attitudes about feminism and to exploring gender roles and the feminine side of themselves.

At some point in their growing and changing in their attitudes toward women and feminism, men may want to speak out against sexism, to be politically involved, or to be part of the men's movement and/or feminist movement.

The changing nature of feminist theory and the antagonistic work of feminists may have both a positive and a negative influence on men's participation in pro-feminist dialogue.

Men who have positive attitudes toward women and feminism may, as part of their continued progress, always feel incomplete in their development. They may not always like the person they are, but they have strong feelings about the pro-feminist person they want to be and are searching to become this kind of person.

The Impact of Higher Education

Each of the men's stories includes higher education settings. It may be useful to focus on how higher education impacted the important themes in these men's lives. What are some of the roles which higher education played in each man's development?

For Bill, working with a female boss in a university office has forced him to adjust and rethink some of his attitudes. Because of his own experience, he has become aware of how men and women are perceived differently in a higher education work setting.

Tom observed sexual harassment and decided not to be one of the good old boys, but to become involved and work to stop it. Issues of sexual harassment, power, egoism, and equality in higher education have become very real for him because of what he has experienced.

The course which George took as a first-year college student helped begin his awareness of feminism and make him more open to discuss sexuality. His attendance at and participation in higher education-sponsored events concerning feminist issues have been important to his continued development.

Stephen's development is related to his housing experience as an undergraduate, when he saw the daily life of a woman and her child and realized that he did not have to life his life a certain way.

Bob's growth is linked to his graduate school experience, particularly to that of his wife's and her seminary work in women's issues, when they went through a period of consciousness-raising.

The Web of Men's Feminist Development

The use of a radical humanist paradigm precludes efforts to map linear, hierarchical stages of how men develop positive attitudes toward women and feminism. Becoming a pro-feminist man is not a cumulative educational or psychological process.

All of the conversion experiences and epiphanies mentioned in the interviews somehow involve relationships. Bill went through a divorce. Tom looked with new lenses at a friend across the room, wondering what it was like to be another person. Bob accompanied his wife through an intense period of consciousness-raising, waking up one day to the complexities of the situation and beginning to challenge his own behavior. Stephen became part of the life of a woman and a child who lived next door to him, then realized that his own life didn't have to be the way it was. George's obsession and compulsion for pornographic images were changed when he contrasted them with the real life, sexual relationship which he became involved in.

According to the men's stories described in this research, pro-feminist development is not necessarily fostered by designing a curriculum of feminist theory for men or by confronting men with their sexist attitudes and behavior. Rather, positive attitudes may be developed whenever and wherever men are able to pay attention to the issues in their relationships. Critical incidents in feminist development may take place in any setting and at any time. The important thing is not that men learn the substantive content knowledge of feminist ideas and ideals, but that they are motivated to act on these in their real-life, day-to-day relationships.

> Afrocentrist to put African ideals and values at the center of inquiry. If this does not happen then Afrocentricity does not exist (Asante, 1990, pp. 6-7).

If this concept is taken to its natural extension, then all inquiry should begin without literature searches or theories, unless these were undertaken from an Afrocentric perspective. While the assumption of whether knowledge is cumulative is unclear in Afrocentricity, Afrocentric research needs to be built upon previous Afrocentric research, not upon Eurocentric approaches to Afrocentric topics.

It was shown in the discussion about intersecting issues of race, gender, and class that Afrocentrism requires that sensitivity to issues of oppression needs to be built, in one sense, from scratch. The cutting edge of Afrocentric theory suggests that this is the same for Afrocentric knowledge. Afrocentric scholars only know that which has been learned from an Afrocentric perspective of place. All other knowledge, however important it may seem to concepts of the psychology or history of racial oppression, is Eurocentric unless all Eurocentric roots have been severed and/or it has been nurtured from the ground up with an Afrocentric rooting.

"Location is paramount because it provides the cultural anchoring, indeed the centering, in some thought" (Azibo, 1992, p. 84). Someone may be oriented to Afrocentrism, but not located. Azibo explains that:

> The orientation vs. location distinction is articulated here clearly and rigidly relegates as non-Africentric that work which does not use concepts, variables, and formulations deriving from the African cultural factors and cultural aspects. By this standard much, if not most, of what Black Studies scholars produce today would appear not to be Africentric. (Azibo, 1992, pp. 84-85).

**Role of the Researcher**

All of the Afrocentrists agree that the barrier between researcher and respondent or subject is artificial (Note: the term subject is still used frequently). There should be no pretense of scholarly objectivity or detachment. Rather, the researcher is immersed in the raw, subjective data of human existence as part of a political role. Asante (1990) explains that phenomenology and Afrocentrism are similar in their views of the researcher-respondent relationship, but "for different reasons." As one may see in African dance or the African American church, the "separation of subject/object, speaker/audience, dancer/spectators, or investigator/subject is artificial" (p. 27).

The researcher needs to examine herself or himself in order to understand the concept of location. This is similar to the "intellectual/activist autobiographies" which Stewart (1992) mentions as important for "exemplars" of research. Asante explains that "We have developed the concept of introspection, which means what you as the researcher feel about the topic before you undertake to study it. Thus, in any ethnography we ask the scholar to put